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STATE OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, INCLUDING STRATEGIES FOR THEIR IMPROVEMENT

Letter dated 4 June 1996 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General of the Conference

A Regional Cooperation Programme run jointly by the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided the basis for the establishment of a Regional Task Force to formulate the strategies for regional development and cooperation in the fields of human settlements and housing.

The Regional Task Force, which consists of representatives of Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, held its 3rd meeting on 31 May 1996 in Ankara and finalized its report to be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) by the delegation of Turkey. I have the honour to enclose herewith the report prepared by the Regional Task Force* and its Chairman's summary (see annex).

I should be grateful to have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) under agenda item 8, entitled "State of human settlements, including strategies for their improvement".

(Signed) Hüseyin E. ÇELEM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
Turkey to the United Nations

* The report is circulated in the language of submission.

Annex

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The Regional Task Force which consists of representatives from Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, held its 3rd meeting on 31 May 1996 in Ankara and finalized the report to be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

The decisions reached by consensus by the Representatives of the Task Force are as follows:

1. The Regional House will be established in Istanbul under the name of "Eurasian Regional House". The functions which this House will assume, were also decided and agreed upon.

2. Technical, organizational and financial matters concerning the establishment and the functioning of the "Eurasian Regional House" will be worked out under the coordination of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) by a committee to be convened and will be presented to the Regional Task Force at its upcoming meeting.

3. The above-mentioned report will be submitted to the Habitat II Conference by the Delegation of Turkey, to be circulated as an official Conference document under the relevant agenda item.

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL TASK FORCE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (HABITAT II)

31 May 1996

Formation of the Regional Task Force

1. The "Memorandum of Understanding" signed in April 1995 by the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) and UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS (UNDP/RBEC) covering activity areas for regional cooperation, and the Regional Cooperation Programme for the Implementation of the Global Plan of Action (RER/95/013) developed to serve towards the enhancement of regional technical cooperation for Habitat II, have provided the basis for the convention of a Regional Preparatory Workshop on Habitat II Conference. Organized jointly by TICA and UNDP on 26-28 October 1995 in Ankara, this Workshop reviewed national preparations, including the formation and activities of National Committees, the implementation of the Indicators Programme, and the drafting of National Reports and Plans of Action.

2. The Workshop agreed that a Regional Task Force with the membership of Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan be established to serve on a permanent basis for the identification of priority issues and formulation of strategies for regional development and cooperation in the fields of human settlements development and housing. The Workshop further agreed that the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) as the executing agency, in cooperation with UNDP/Turkey on behalf of the UNDP/RBEC, would facilitate the necessary mechanisms for the smooth functioning of the Regional Task Force.

3. The first meeting of the Regional Task Force took place in Ankara from 23 to 26 January 1996 with the attendance of delegations from member countries. A delegation of Bosnia-Herzegovina also attended the meeting on special invitation. The purpose of this meeting was to produce and adopt a Report on regional priority issues to be identified during discussions under the agenda item on "Regional Development and Cooperation Modalities" in the fields of human settlements development and housing.

4. With the aim of facilitating the proper reflection of regional concerns and priorities in the Global Plan of Action to be adopted at the Habitat II Conference, as agreed by the Regional Task Force, the Preparatory Committee of Habitat II on the work of the Regional Task Force at its third substantive session held in New York on 5-15 February, 1996, was informed of the Interim Report.

5. The Regional Task Force met again on 31 May 1996 in Ankara to finalize its report.

6. The countries in the Region undergoing systemic political and economic transition are in the process of reformulating their housing and human settlements policies, an effort which requires strengthening of regional cooperation in these fields. Problems with transboundary effects, and problems occurring at the regional level, also necessitate regional cooperation since their solutions call for regional collaboration. Below are the priority issues for regional cooperation in the fields of human settlements development and housing, as they are identified by the Regional Task Force.

(a) Integration into the Global Network of Human Settlements and Improvement of Intra-Regional Networks

7. New developments in communications and transportation technologies have facilitated easy and rapid flow of resources and information among human settlements of the world, and resulted in the development of a global network of human settlements capable of managing resources and information. Human settlements cannot anymore develop and prosper in isolation. Integration into these networks has become the prerequisite for improving the economic base of human settlements.

8. Countries in the Region are, therefore, in a position of enhancing their links with these networks in order to make the benefits of global integration accessible to their populace. The integration capacity of human settlements in the Region to the newly emerging networks is, however, highly dependent on the improvement of international transportation and communication links, such as telecommunication infrastructure, computerized information networks, highways, airports and seaports. Living conditions and economic prosperity in the human settlements of the Region need to be further recuperated by the improvement of intra-regional and national communications and transportation links, especially between rural areas and large cities.

9. The revitalization of the Great Silk Road as an international thoroughfare linking the Pacific with the Mediterranean and Western Europe, is considered one of the most important projects for improving network relations of the Region. The project has a great potential for increasing the capacity of the Region in trade and tourism related activities.

10. The special condition of land-locked countries, and spatial inequalities within the Region also require investments in the communications and transportation infrastructure to effectively connect these places to regional and global markets.

(b) Sustainable development and environmental protection

11. Countries in the Region fully recognize the need for sustainable planning and development of their human settlements, and the need for rational and responsible use of natural resources.

12. Most urgently, high levels of pollution of seas, lakes and waterways of the Region should be curbed, and deforestation, land erosion, land slides, and wasteful use of irrigation waters be prevented. These environmental threats have put the eco-system and the economic sustenance of the people of the Region at great risk.

13. The drying up of the Aral Sea, and the associated desert encroachment and desalination of vast territories is one of the biggest ecological disasters not only of the Region, but of our planet itself. Caused by the excessive use of water for irrigation from the Amyr Daria and Syr Daria Rivers, the Aral crisis affects millions of people, and a large number of human settlements located within the affected zone of disaster. The rehabilitation of the Aral Sea, therefore, necessitates the restoration of its eco-system, as well as the revitalization of economies of human settlements in the area.

14. The rising of the sea level in the Caspian Sea, flooding agricultural lands and a large number of settlements, poses another threat to the environment and surrounding coastal settlements. The protection of coastal infrastructure such as railways from flood waters gains utmost importance.

15. Present and probable future pollution of both the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea and the adjacent coastal areas should be prevented by the proper application of environmentally-sound infrastructure for waste management, and by rehabilitation of lands polluted by oil products.

16. Sustainable development and environmental protection further necessitate changes in production, consumption and transportation patterns in the Region. The promotion of sustainable ways of managing waste and non-renewable resources, and sustainable ways for producing and consuming energy with the implementation of appropriate and advanced technologies is the new environmental challenge facing the Region.

(c) Improvement of social and cultural life

17. The turmoil of transition experienced in most of the countries in the Region has damaged the social fabric, and impaired the cultural life of people, the adverse consequences of which are felt mostly in large cities. In some places, curtailment of cultural activities, worsening of the status of women, decline in school enrollment, eruption of juvenile delinquency, high unemployment and emergence of underground economic activities are observed. Democratic mechanisms for social integration, and enhancement of education, training, recreation, sports and cultural programmes and facilities are the needed remedies for addressing these social problems. Special attention should be paid to the empowering of women in the society, and to their capacity in accomplishing social harmony and advancement. Children also require protection, support, and guarantees for equal opportunity for a better common future.

(d) Formulation of new housing policies

18. Most of the countries in the Region are in the process of transforming the entire systems of housing production and delivery systems while undergoing transition from centrally planned economies to the market allocation system. Problems that have arisen in this process are of great concern, and require special attention. In places where housing markets have been functioning for a long time, market outcomes are assessed by efficiency and equity considerations. Alongside these considerations, the following issues should be incorporated in the evaluation of existing conditions of the housing sector, and in the design of guidelines for new policies:

(i) Recognition of adequate housing as a basic need and a human right;

(ii) Revision of planning and building regulations, and redefinition of roles of central and local governments in the planning process;

(iii) Revision of land development and management systems, including the development of property rights on land, and cadastre and land registration systems;

(iv) Creation of non-traditional finance mechanisms for financing urban infrastructure and housing development;

(v) Development of a house-building technology and industry with the capacity of producing sufficient amount of adequate housing under competitive market conditions;

(vi) Improvement of construction and environmental quality, and livability conditions of housing sites;

(vii) Enabling of people and their organizations to produce housing for their own use;

(viii) Development of a housing finance system which is can function under the national financial system;

(ix) Commitment of the public sector to develop mechanisms for meeting housing needs of the poor and the vulnerable groups who cannot afford shelter in the housing market;

(x) Development of legislation on property rights, on mortgage instruments, and on the management of buildings in multiple ownership;

(xi) Development of mechanisms in support of initiatives of local governments and non-governmental organizations in housing and human settlements development projects, as well as in the modernization and management of the housing stock under their ownership.

(e) Responding to Problems of Migration, and Rural-Urban and Regional Disparities

19. Countries in the Region are confronted with major problems due to new waves of migration among settlements within national borders and beyond. This requires new policies and resource allocation to solve the problems of employment, housing, and social and technical infrastructure both at the source and destination of migration. The migratory movements in the Region can be classified as migrations aggravated due the political transition, and as migrations from rural areas to urban centers.

20. In countries where the underlying cause for migration is the spatial disparities between rural and urban areas, and between different geographical regions, the development and adoption of effective policies for balanced development of human settlements, investments in rural development, and integration of rural economies to national economies, are needed. At the destination points of migration, urban economies, housing supply conditions and urban infrastructure need to be improved to accommodate the new comers, and new employment and income generating opportunities for the poor and vulnerable segments in urban centers should be created.

(f) Strengthening of Local Governments and Processes of Decentralization

21 Countries in the Region recognize the fact that a democratic, decentralized and participatory system of governing of human settlements is needed to better respond to local needs, and for more efficient urban management. For this purpose, legal frameworks need to be modified to allow for increased local autonomy in decision making, implementation, monitoring, and resource mobilization and use, and for local revenue generation and financial capacity. The reinforcement of participatory processes and institutionalization of greater transparency in the management of local resources are the necessary mechanisms through which democratic ideals and efficiency in management should be achieved.

(g) Protection of cultural and historical heritage and traditional livelihoods

22 Settlements, neighborhoods and monuments of historic and cultural significance in the countries of the Region need to be properly protected and rehabilitated for the preservation of cultural identities, and ensuring cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world. The devastation of livelihoods in especially the mountainous areas of the Region manifests the erosion of cultural traditions which have developed over centuries of history. Local cultural heritage can be sustained only if the calamity of economic decay in remote mountainous communities is reversed through the introduction of appropriate technologies and adequate living standards.

(h) Disaster mitigation

23. Countries in the Region are located in one of the most disaster-prone parts of the World. The impact of natural disasters is especially severe where preparedness and response capacities are ineffective in dealing with the consequences. Man-made disasters, and industrial and technical accidents with large scale effects, pose another threat to the people of the Region. Development of disaster prevention, preparedness and post-disaster rehabilitation capacities throughout the Region are urgently needed. The improvement and promotion of seismic-proof construction standards, and increased capacity and networking of seismic stations and warning systems in the Region should constitute the initial steps toward regional cooperation.

(i) Solutions to the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons

24. The problems of refugees and internally displaced persons are an ongoing plight of the Region. The facilitation of return and sheltering of peoples uprooted from their homelands during World War II, is one of the compelling issues. The deplorable predicament of refugees and forcefully displaced persons of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan is one of the greatest worries of our time requiring special attention by the international community. Political action, and technical and financial cooperation at regional and international levels are needed for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes and original homelands, and for the rebuilding housing destroyed by armed conflict and war.

(j) Consideration on Bosnia and Herzegovina

25. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as an independent and sovereign country, has gone through a devastating war, consequences of which are tragic. The crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina signify a major offense against international commitments and efforts for sustainable development of human settlements and for a better future for the humanity. The Members of the Regional Task Force deplore all crimes against humanity, the destruction and siege of cities, and intentional and systematic destruction of cultural heritage, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also confirm the readiness to support and assist the sheltering of homeless victims of the war, the repatriation of refugees, the rehabilitation of destroyed settlements, and reconstruction of historical sites and monuments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Members of the Regional Task Force invite all the participants to the UN Conference on Human Settlements, HABITAT II, to support and assist international efforts in the reconstruction of this country, and in building a sustainable future for settlements and shelter for people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Decision about the establishment of a "Regional House"

26. The Regional Task Force at its first meeting expressed the need for a new institutional arrangement for regional cooperation in the fields of housing and human settlements development, and for addressing the priority issues stated in this Report. The proposal of the Delegation of Georgia about the establishment of a "Regional House" to meet this need, was received with much anticipation, and was adopted unanimously by the Regional Task Force.

27. The Regional Task Force has decided the "Eurasian Regional House" to be established in Istanbul and to assume the following functions :

(a) Formulation and coordination of policies for the realization of the human right to adequate housing, for sustainable development of human settlements, including also its philosophical dimensions.

(b) Regular exchange of information and transfer of know-how in legislative, scientific, technical, financial, and other areas, with the aim of harmonizing legal frameworks, and construction norms, standards and rules;

(c) Project development in accordance with the priority issues in the Region, mobilization of regional funds to finance these projects, and bringing these project to the attention of other investors and international finance institutions;

(d) Development of common terminology, conceptualizations, and criteria for, among others, definitions of settlement sizes, territorial divisions, areal responsibilities of local governments, and livability standards in terms of availability of adequate social and technical services;

(e) Development of regional criteria for housing indicators, in compliance with the Habitat indicators, to monitor housing conditions in the countries of the Region.

(f) Development of joint programs for international and intra-regional transport, trade and communication networks and infrastructure, such as the Asia-Europe highway.

(g) Joint scientific and technical research, and training of staff in the spheres of architecture, construction engineering, and city and regional planning.

(h) Promotion of the development and use of environmentally-sound building materials, technologies and energy sources, and introduction of new advanced technologies.

(i) Coordination of activities aimed at solving the refugee problems and mitigation of natural disasters, including the design for mobile temporary shelters and seismic-proof buildings.

(j) Formulation and development of sound policies for the preservation of natural landscapes and eco-systems as well as for the preservation, reconstruction and rehabilitation of historical settlements.

28. Technical, organizational and financial matters concerning the establishment and the functioning of the "Eurasian Regional House" will be worked out under the coordination of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) by a committee to be convened and will be presented to the Regional Task Force at its upcoming meeting.

29. It was decided that this present report be circulated as a Conference Document under the relevant agenda item at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II).